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ABSTRACT

The University of California's grading/credit policy for advanced placement (AP) courses taken by high school students is discussed. The university traditionally has encouraged high school students to take AP courses if they are prepared and mature enough to benefit from them. The university grants credit for scores of 3, 4, or 5 earned on AP Tests given by the College Board. The university's admission evaluators grant subject credit, graduation credit, or credit toward breadth requirements for all AP tests in which at least a score of 3 is obtained. During 1981-1982 the University's Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) considered changes in admission requirements, and high schools requested that the university provide some inducement for high school students to take the most challenging AP courses offered by the high school. Students avoided the courses because of fear that AP course grades would lower their high school grade point average (GPA). It was decided that in calculating GPA used for admission to the university, the grades of A, B, and C in up to eight honors level courses taken by high school juniors or seniors would be increased by one grade point each. BOARS also established guidelines for these courses to encourage high school students to take additional honors level (including AP) courses. (SW)

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## ABSTRACT

# HOW COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES EMPLOY CREDIT AND PLACEMENT FOR ADVANCED ACADEMIC STUDIES

by

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The University of California has traditionally encouraged high school students to take Advanced Placement (AP) courses provided they are properly prepared for them and have reached a level of maturity allowing them to benefit from these courses in the same way they would if they had taken them at the University. It grants credit for scores 3, 4, or 5 earned on AP Tests given by the College Board.

In order to encourage high school students to take additional honors level (including AP) courses without being penalized by possibly lower grades, the University will, effective with students entering in fall 1984, award for grades A, B, and C, in up to eight honors level courses taken in the student's last two years of high school, 5, 4, and 3 gradepoints, respectively, rather than the usual 4, 3, and 2. At the same time, the University established guidelines for these honors level courses so that high accomplishments could be expected.

The advantages for students and the University of taking AP courses were then reviewed, as well as some concerns which have been raised, the main one being about how equivalent the courses are to college experience.

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# HOW COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES EMPLOY CREDIT AND PLACEMENT FOR ADVANCED ACADEMIC STUDIES

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The University of California has traditionally encouraged high school students to take Advanced Placement (AP) courses provided they are properly prepared for them and have reached a level of maturity allowing them to benefit from these courses in the same way they would if they had taken them at the University. It grants credit for scores of 3, 4, or 5 earned on AP Tests given by the College Board. The University's admission evaluators grant subject credit, graduation credit, or credit towards breadth requirements for all AP tests in which at least a score of 3 has been reported by the College Board. There is considerable variation in the way each of the University's various schools and colleges grant AP credit reflecting the variation in course offerings, major requirements, and breadth requirements between schools and colleges.

During the years 1981-82, when changes in admission requirements to the University of California were under discussion in the University's Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS), which I chaired at that time, repeated requests were received from high schools that the University should provide some inducement for high school students to take the most challenging advanced courses offered by the high school that all too often were being avoided. The reason given for this avoidance was that students were afraid that the grades received in these honors or advanced placement courses might be lower than could be achieved in less challenging courses, and thus their high school grade point average would suffer. Accordingly, early in this discussion BOARS proposed that, in the calculation of the academic GPA used for admission to the University of California, the grades A, B, and C in up to eight "honors level" courses taken in the student's last two years of high school would be increased by one grade point each, that is, an A would count for 5 gradepoints instead of 4, a B for 4 gradepoints instead of 3, and a C for 3 gradepoints instead of 2. At the same time, BOARS agreed to establish guidelines for these honors level courses so that high levels of accomplishments could be expected.

This honor grade differential was an integral part of the admissions change proposal placed on the table for discussion in 1981. In the period from June 1981 to March 1982, when the proposals were formally adopted by BOARS and then by the Academic Senate and the Regents of the University of California, these proposals were presented and discussed in over 60 meetings that BOARS' members held with teachers, school administrators, parents, and state officials up and down the state. The response was nearly universally

favorable. What objections there were usually arose because the program did not go far enough. There were requests that there be no upper limit on the number of courses to receive additional honors level credit and that honors courses in grade 10 and perhaps grade 9 count as well. BOARS, however, decided against removal of the upper limit of 8 semester courses eligible for the additional honors level credit for many reasons, in particular, since it felt that this new venture should be started on a modest scale in order to be able to assess its effectiveness before going too far. It also rejected suggestions to allow the additional honors level credit for courses taken in grades 9 and 10 because of its belief that, for honors level courses, a certain level of maturity is required which can hardly be expected prior to grade 11 and, in addition, the material learned in grades 9 and 10 might well be forgotten when needed in the follow-up courses taken in the University, that is, these courses should be taken as close as possible to the student's entry into the University.

The honors policy was attractive to most, but not all, of the members of BOARS on several grounds. First, it would provide an inducement for students to take these courses in place of less challenging ones and thus come to the University better prepared. Secondly, the guidelines would specify what the University meant by honors level courses. Thirdly, no student would be adversely affected as far as admissibility to the University is concerned since all students achieving a GPA of 3.3 or above in the academic courses are granted admission. Perhaps more students might become eligible because a GPA below 3.3 might be raised above this level. However, this number certainly would be small.

BOARS originally proposed the honors grading policy to go into effect in the fall of 1986 along with the other major changes in admission requirements. However, at the urging of many school officials and teachers during the winter and spring of 1982, BOARS moved this date up to fall 1984, and this date was part of the proposal approved by the Academic Senate and the Regents. This means that the additional credit for honors level courses is in effect now for the first time for students who entered the University this fall.

BOARS has approved guidelines designed to specify clearly what it means by an honors level course. These courses must be in the areas of history, English, advanced mathematics, laboratory science, and foreign language. In addition, to be certified as honors level courses, BOARS specified eight guidelines, of which I will just mention three:

1. College courses in the above fields which are transferable to the University of California and which appear on the high school transcript are considered to be honors level courses.

2. Courses in the above fields which are designed to prepare students for an Advanced Placement Examination of the College Board are considered to be honors level courses.

3. In addition to Advanced Placement Courses, high schools may certify as honors level courses at most one unit in each of the following subject areas: history, English, advanced mathematics, laboratory science, and each foreign language. If there are no Advanced Placement Courses in a given subject area, the high school may certify at most two units in that area. Exceptions to this rule require strong justification and documentation.

The University of California is convinced that the AP program is very successful in the sense that very good teachers teach the courses, very good students take them and learn a great deal, in many cases presumably more than they would have if they had taken them in college due to the greater amount of time devoted to them in high school. Thus, as educational experiences, the courses are excellent.

For this reason, BOARS has recently removed two additional obstacles to the incentives for students to take AP courses.

The number of college units granted for AP tests are no longer counted toward the maximum number of credit required for formal declaration of an undergraduate major so that students who enter the University with AP credit are not required to declare a major earlier than students who do not have such credit.

Further, the number of AP units granted are not counted toward the maximum number of units a student may accumulate prior to graduation from the University so that students who enter the University with AP credit are not required to graduate earlier than students who do not have such credit.

These policies by the University are clearly designed to increase the incentives for high school students to take AP courses and receive college credit for them and can be expected to result in increased enrollment of high school students in AP courses. The advantages for students and the University are obvious:

For students, they include: the opportunity to learn the material of AP courses at a more leisurely pace than they would at the University, the ability to start their University work at a higher level than would otherwise be the case and, as a result, the opportunity to take more advanced courses before graduation from the University and/or completion of their University work in shorter time and thereby reducing the cost of their University education.

For the University, they include: admission of better prepared students, reduced enrollment pressure on introductory freshman courses, and reduction in costs since students with AP credit can graduate with fewer courses at the University.

I would, however, be less than honest if I did not mention also some concerns which have been raised. The main one is to ask the question about how equivalent the courses are to college experience. This concern arises from the fact that the equivalence of the experience as a minimum is judged solely by performance on a single examination on a single day. There are very few college courses -- especially at the introductory level -- which are tested in this manner. When far fewer students took such courses and when funding was not so tight and perhaps less pressure on teachers to get high student scores on tests, it is likely that more schools and teachers played by the rules, insisting on all prerequisites, both in terms of courses and student maturity, etc. While this is hardly a problem in mathematics, it is of concern in other subject areas, in particular, science, where students may not have completed sufficient background coursework in related areas, e.g.: chemistry before AP biology. In addition, students may receive far less laboratory experience than at college. It still may be possible to do very well on the test without either, but the student will be very much at a disadvantage when this is permitted. Similar concerns exist for AP courses in English, foreign language, and the fine arts.

It is for this reason that BOARS has developed the guidelines for honors level courses, for example, guideline 5 which states that "honors level courses must have established prerequisites and must be open only to those fulfilling those prerequisites. Such prerequisites must specify those courses which are required as well as appropriate performance levels."

It may be that such a guideline or requirement should be instituted for all AP courses in order to make an already successful program even more effective and so that it can continue to be faithful to its goals and objectives.